

1073

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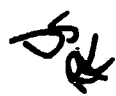


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TCS 2821/91
24 May 1991 

1074

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(b)(3)

(b)(3)

1075

~~Top Secret~~

(b)(3)

Contents

NR Record

Ethiopia: Rebels Close In on Capital

5

NR Record

~~Top Secret~~

TCS 2821/91

24 May 1991

(b)(3)

1086

~~Top Secret~~

(b)(3)

Israel Faces Challenge of Absorbing Falashas

Although usually referred to as Falashas or "outsiders" in Ethiopia, Ethiopian Jews call themselves Beta Esrael or "House of Israel." They practice a distinctive form of Judaism based on the Bible and post-Biblical scripture, resulting in their oppression in Ethiopia. The religious status of the Ethiopian Jews was disputed until 1973, when one of Israel's chief Rabbis decided they were part of the 10 lost tribes; the Israeli Government then declared them eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return.

Many Ethiopian Jews have had difficulty adjusting to life in Israel even though the government offers a comprehensive assimilation program. Their adjustment has been hampered by their traditional rural occupations, illiteracy, and religious practices that differ from Orthodox Judaism. About one-third of the Falasha families who came to Israel during the 1985 Ethiopian drought reportedly still live in converted absorption centers. Some Israelis also are wary of the Ethiopian Jews because of their darker skin color, according to press reports.

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~~Top Secret~~

TCS 2821/91

24 May 1991

1087

~~Top Secret~~

(b)(3)

ISRAEL-ETHIOPIA: Falasha Airlift Beginning

Acting President Tesfaye yesterday told [redacted] he would let all Ethiopian Jews—Falashas—leave, paving the way for Israeli aircraft to begin carrying them out last night. [redacted] the operation will take 45 to 55 hours. Earlier this week Israel offered \$35 million for permission to start the airlift. [redacted]

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Comment: Almost all of the 17,000 Falashas in Ethiopia probably will be evacuated. A few may not reach Addis Ababa in time, but Tel Aviv almost certainly will seek a followup operation to bring them to Israel. The new Ethiopian Government probably hopes its quick action on the Falashas will gain it US good will and Israeli money. Israel's sense of urgency almost certainly results from Tel Aviv's perception that former Ethiopian President Mengistu's departure and continuing rebel gains jeopardize the Falashas' long-term emigration prospects. [redacted]

(b)(3)

NR Record

~~Top Secret~~TCS 2821/91
24 May 1991